Leaving Your Comfort Zone

Sharda Rogell · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2007) · 55:22

So this morning, for those of you who were at the morning sit, this gentleman over here had the question about wanting to freshen his experience. He talked about how he noticed there was a reflection on how his experience was so familiar. And he said, you know, like the same thoughts, the same pain, the same stewed prunes. And it's like noticing that kind of repetition of experience and how to have that quality of freshening, brightening.

I think it's a really important question for us, this question about refreshing. Later, a yogi came in and said, yeah, it's like Groundhog Day. Many of you have probably seen that movie. And retreat can be very much like that kind of experience of Groundhog Day, where it's just the same thing again and again and again. And this sense of, how do you get out of this? How can this experience feel more fresh, more bright?

So I was reflecting on this when I was putting my talk together this afternoon, and I was sensing that it's really a very beautiful intention to want to freshen the mind. But I really wonder if when we ask for that, when we ask for this freshening, do we really know what we're asking for? Do we really know what we're inviting?

Because what we're really saying is that in order to move away from the familiar into that which is fresh, we have to let go of what we know. We have to let go of the familiar and the known and move into the unfamiliar and the unknown. And most people do everything they possibly can to avoid that. They don't want to move into the unknown. They want to keep their situation, their circumstances familiar and comfortable and secure. This is really the whole movement of people's lives—to keep this construction very safe and secure. In a way, it's the whole position of the ego, of the small self, to hold itself together in quite a configured way so that things don't change so much, so that we stay in the familiar.

For me, I've had much more appreciation for what we're really doing in this practice. At Spirit Rock in California, I often teach beginning classes—we call them Vipassana 101 classes. I just taught one last month, and you get a group of people who really haven't sat or really looked at their mind very much. I started this class at Spirit Rock with about forty people. And when I begin, I really know what I'm beginning to ask these people to do, which is to let go—to let go of everything that is familiar, everything that you know, that you take to be true.

And it's always interesting to me that I start off with a rather large class, and by the end, there's less than half the people in the class. I think I ended with about twenty people over six weeks. Either I'm not a very good teacher and people are put off by me, but I don't think that's actually what it is. It's that once people start to actually get a sense of what's being asked of them, it's not just, "Oh, let's go into a very open and

tranquil and lovely meditative space together where we're all just going to hang out." When they realize that's not what's actually being taught, it's like, "Okay, I think I'll do this maybe next year, or when I feel a little bit more ready in myself."

This practice really requires that we leave our comfort zone, because this trying to keep things familiar and secure and safe to a certain degree keeps our comfort. And we have to let go of our comfort in order to do this practice.

Coming here to a retreat such as this is really a way that you are leaving your comfort zone. You wouldn't be able to come here, you wouldn't be able to do the kind of practice you're doing if you weren't willing to leave your comfort zone. And what you might find is that the conditions here are so beautiful and secure, and there's such a sense of safety, that there may be a way that you start to feel comfortable again. You find your spots in the hall and your walking paths and the times that you're going to get your food. And again, you can create your little territory and sense of safety and comfort. And that's okay. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that. It's okay that we do that because the conditions here really are very supportive for this investigation and this letting go. These conditions here really are in support of this renunciation that I'm speaking about.

It's an act of renunciation. There's already so much that you've let go of to come here, to be here. So much of the usual distractions and stimulations and engagements—your family and loved ones and work and the worldly pleasures and offerings that we engage with. There's so much that you've let go of already. So it is an act of renunciation to be here, leaving your comfort zone.

But it's challenging. It's challenging because you're right up against that edge in a way, knowing that you're being asked to let go—or you're even inviting yourself to let go—of the known, of the familiar. We are generally, as human beings, culturally, so addicted to stimulation, to engaging in activities that keep us occupied in some way.

We go from one thing to the next thing to the next thing. And particularly in this day and age, with all the multitasking and so much happening and all the speed and all the activities, we can keep pretty engaged and pretty active if we like to be. So we have let go of quite a lot.

But we can see even here how there's a kind of addiction to control—an addiction to wanting to have our external experiences, our external situation, and our internal experiences be a particular way. That's a lot of what we examine: this way that the ego self, this conditioned self, wants to manipulate experience to meet our needs, our expectations, our desires, our wants. And the mind, how the mind's moving for and against so that we can generate conditions that are suitable for us, that we like, that we feel comfortable in, that we say, "Yeah, this is good, this is what I want."

We're so conditioned to move out through our senses towards pleasure. We're conditioned to move out through our mind towards pleasure—fantasies, memories, planning, future ideas—how the mind leans,

how the senses lean out. And we can see how we might want to manipulate and create the conditions here for that. This is so habitual for us, this kind of searching mind. We're searching for those conditions that are going to do it for us. Fixing this and checking this and making little adjustments here and refinements there so that perhaps we can find a place to rest.

For me, a good metaphor is this: sometimes I find myself at home—I happen to pay for cable TV, and there's about a hundred channels with the remote control. Sometimes when I don't have too much to do, I'll sit there and surf through the channels, searching, searching, searching for somewhere that I can just rest and be interested in something that's happening on TV. But what usually happens is I'm searching and searching and there's nothing worth watching, nothing that's interesting. But then I'll just keep going a little bit longer. It's so unsatisfying, even these hundred channels.

You might be laughing because it might be similar to your own mind—the hundred channels in your own mind, searching for this place where you can say, "Ah, okay, now I can rest here." Fortunately, I watch what I'm doing so I don't indulge in it too long, otherwise I could really get quite compulsive with it. It could be very unpleasant.

One time I did the most intensive retreat for myself. I set up a three-week solitary retreat in New Zealand at this center that I love a lot called Temawata, in the north part of the North Island. The place where I had a little cabin was in the woods, down in a valley—you had to walk up to get there, and it wasn't on top of a hill. I would much prefer being on top of a hill where I have a lot of sky and space. But this was kind of down, a little bit dark, in the bush. And I was completely alone, solitary for three weeks there. Somebody would come every three or four days and bring a little package of food and put it outside my door. I didn't see anybody or talk to anybody.

It was much harder than I thought it was going to be. I think I was a little naive in thinking that I could actually be that solitary. It was very hard for me to keep my mind uplifted, to stay in a place of some happiness or some ease. Very difficult to be in those conditions of so much isolation and solitude.

And there was this one bird, this one bird that had the most beautiful bird song. When it would sing, the song would echo through the whole valley. It would sing maybe three or four times in the day. I think it was a tui bird. This tui bird has this beautiful, exquisite song with many different ranges to its voice.

I would wait for that song. I noticed how my mind would just lean, waiting for that beautiful song. And when the song actually came, my heart would raise up. I'd feel so uplifted. It would go on for probably ten seconds, fifteen seconds—long enough to make contact and rest in it. And I would just be so happy, just uplifted and happy.

And then it would go away. And then I noticed I would just kind of fall down again. And then I'd wait. Wait for the song.

It was almost as if that was the only thing I could depend on that would help me feel some upliftment in

myself. And yet I was dependent. I was attached to that song because I couldn't find the resources in myself at that time. I just couldn't find a place for my mind to rest. So I would look, I would search for where my mind could rest, even for five seconds or ten seconds.

Ah, that peace, that *ahh* feeling.

So it's like this question: What are we searching for? What are we searching for when we move out in that way through the senses, through our fantasies, our mind, all those plans and images? What are we searching for?

I think it is this rest, this kind of peace where we can just put it all down. And sometimes we have those kinds of experiences where it's like, *yes*, this is what I've been waiting for. And it feels so wonderful. The mind and the body, the heart, can just settle and rest. And it's wonderful.

And yet it often passes. It usually passes. It doesn't last. It's not stable. And so then we search and we're searching again. We want that.

It seems that there's some kind of inner knowing that it is possible for us to find this place of rest—or even if it's not a place, some way that our mind can rest and we can know deeply this sense of peace. It's like there's something inherent in our being that knows that possibility. So we keep searching. We keep longing for that.

But it's almost as if we don't know where to look. We get confused. So we just keep reaching out, keep going out. Where is it? Like I did with the bird. And it can be quite sorrowful sometimes, quite disappointing, that this seems so elusive to us, this sense of peace, this sense of rest. It's very sad, very painful in some ways, that there's this intuitive sense that inherently this is possible, but we don't know where to go. We don't know where to find it.

I was talking to my mother the other day, and she was doing her usual thing of talking about all the things that were troublesome for her. The refrigerator broke down, so she has to have a temporary refrigerator, which is too small, and she can't put all of her stuff in it, and she doesn't know where everything is. And then the car battery broke down because it's just an old battery, and the car is old, and now she can't really use the car. She was waiting for AAA to come and check out the battery so that she could know whether she could drive. And then she put this paint on her stove—she painted it black because it was chipping—but they gave her the wrong kind of paint. So the paint she has on the stove now, when she wipes it, the rag gets black. And she doesn't know whether to take all the paint off and put the new paint on.

She was just going on, and then she said, "Oh, I just wish I had peace. I just wish I could find peace in my mind."

And it's so sorrowful, really, that she's just—all these things are so agitating for her. Not really having the

view, not having the understanding that it's always going to be like that. This is the conditions of our life, of our life as a human being, having a mind, having a body, living in this world. This is how it is. And yet she doesn't have that perspective. And so there's just this agitation, this constant agitation. Always something. And she can't rest. She can't rest.

And then searching for what's going to actually bring that peace and relieve her of this anxiety—trying to get the conditions right. If I get the conditions right, then I can rest.

Have you heard yourself say this to yourself? If I can just get everything lined up just right, then I can rest. Whether it's the outer conditions, whether it's the inner conditions of mind, body, environment—*then* I can rest.

It's a kind of postponement of our peaceful heart. Once all this gets arranged, once I arrange everything the way I want, then... You know, this kind of sense of arranging the furniture in the room, just constantly arranging things.

But it's never right. It's never right.

For me, this started—I remember so well—when I was around thirteen. I was longing for some different conditions in my life. I was miserable in myself, just searching and searching for something that was going to make me happy. I would read lots of self-improvement books; there were a lot of those out in those years. And then I'd look at Seventeen Magazine, because that had the answers, right? If I could just set up those conditions—have those clothes, have those looks, those boyfriends, that kind of personality I was supposed to have—then I was going to be happy.

Always imagining how life could be better, always moving from this place of disappointment, never really appreciating, couldn't appreciate who I was or what I had. Just a habit, this habit of going through the fantasy, constantly creating a sense of myself through the fantasy of what could be possible.

I remember the first clue I had that maybe I was going to have to give this up. I was twenty-one—so that's about eight years of that. I was finally able to create my life in such a way that I could manifest a dream of going off to Europe and traveling. That matched my self-image at the time—if I could be adventurous, have this journey, this independence. I was with a small group of people on a tour, and we were in Italy, somewhere near Pisa. I remember sitting there looking out over the most exquisite and beautiful landscape, just being where I really wanted to be in my fantasy. And I felt miserable. I was so depressed and unhappy. It was the same thing. Nothing had changed. I was exactly the same person as I always had been, even though I was able to create and manifest these different conditions. I was still miserable.

That was the first time I actually had enough awareness to recognize: okay, I've been doing this for some time. Maybe it's time to shift this. I have to look some other place. I have to look some other way.

We have this conditioned belief, a habitual tendency to believe that somehow, somewhere, there is some

kind of permanent refuge for our weary mind, our weary heart. And then this sense of agitation that we can't find it. We can't find it.

But this is actually not a new problem. It's not a problem of the twentieth century or the twenty-first century. The Buddha addresses this very thing, which is why we come to these teachings, to this practice, because it seems to have some helpful answers for us.

This is what the Buddha tells us. He said many things, but this one quote has been very helpful for me: "Agitation comes about because we try to find a permanent refuge in things that are always changing."

It's really a very simple message, and one we keep speaking about. We try to hold on to these changing conditions because we think somehow that's where our happiness lies. But that is the very source of our agitation. Agitation might be another translation for the word dukkha—this stress, this agitation.

We get ourselves into a feedback loop with it, because if we can't find that permanent refuge, then we become more anxious, and we keep searching for the next thing. Unless we somehow get out of that, that's our life. And that's many people's lives. It's called the wheel of samsara, the wheel of birth and death—just being born again and again as the one who is searching and looking in the wrong place, then dying away, then being born again and dying away. This wheel. It's like being in a hamster cage, going around and around and not knowing how to get off.

Something has to change.

Guy also spoke of this when discussing the different kinds of dukkha—particularly parinamadukkha, the psychological pain that arises from grasping onto things that are changing.

But what will get us to stop? What gets us to stop trying to change these conditions that are always changing? They're always changing and they're out of our control—out of the control of ego mind, of ego self, the ego that only knows how to manipulate and control conditions.

That's all the ego knows. It doesn't know anything else. It doesn't know about freedom, about letting go.

So this question: do we need to change the conditions for our peaceful heart? Do we need to change the conditions to find peace?

I've really been so touched by many people that I've met on this retreat who are here with some very, very difficult physical and psychological conditions. I've met a yogi who had a very serious accident, a motorcycle accident, and is having lots of difficulty in his body. People recovering from difficult surgery. People who are in chronic pain and find it very hard to sit for long periods. One person's back went out just here on the retreat—very difficult to sit for long periods. A yogi here dealing with MS. Other people dealing with chronic difficulties. Other people grieving over the loss of loved ones. I mean, there's so much in this room.

I'm just so touched and so moved by people's courage here, the courage to actually sit in this kind of retreat situation and look so directly at what's happening in the mind and body in relationship to these conditions—and practicing letting go, trying to know this place of rest without changing the conditions.

One woman who I was speaking to, who has quite a serious illness, said something very beautiful to me. She had a very important realization. She said that for four years she wanted her body to be well. And then she realized one day: does my body need to be well in order for me to be well? Does my body need to be well in order for me to be well?

And then she realized—she said, "I realize now I want so much more than that." That was a limited view, the way that she had been trying to put so much energy into shifting the way her body was. But she wants so much more than that. She said, "I want to be free. I want to open my heart to compassion for myself and for other beings. I want so much more."

And that realization began to help her to let go, to make room for more of the truth. It opened her up, softened her heart, so that she was able to be even more here, more full with what she was seeing, what she was knowing.

Do we need to change the conditions to find our peaceful heart?

I was talking to a friend just the other day and she told me about this poem that was in the Tibet House newsletter. I asked her to send it to me because it really touched me. It's by a Chinese prisoner who has been in solitary confinement for eighteen years in a Chinese prison. And this is the poem that he wrote:

At dawn, a beam of the sun steals through the window.
At dusk, the sinking Apollo sheds his last tear on the steel door through the light.
Heavily locked, the cell becomes colder and sadder.
Here I have passed eighteen solitary years facing only walls.
Summers, winters came and went.
Spring flowers and autumn moons hide their faces from this place.
Yet I am gratified.
For suffering has always been common for great people.
To this adversity I am deeply beholden.
In hard work and profound thinking, I perceived my inspiration.
Self and other reveal themselves to me.
Everything in this universe is changing, yet they can't confuse me anymore.
I searched for happiness in the hardship, and finding it, the hardship I overcame.
And to a harvest I can lay claim.
Freedom, I lost you—
this is the freedom of being outside in the world—
Freedom, I lost you in pursuit of you.

Though without you, I still feel free in my heart.
Freedom, I lost you in pursuit of you.
Though without you, I still feel free in my heart.

So profound. Really so miraculous that the possibility for each one of us to wake up is here no matter what. No matter what. As long as we have a conscious mind, so much is possible for us. And reading something like that, hearing about something like that, is so inspiring for me—what's possible for us.

When we begin to understand, we can't reach out anymore in the same way that we have been. This tinkering—I call it the tinkering of the ego mind—manipulating, controlling the way things are. This movement of mind that creates so much anxiety for us.

I want to tell you a story about a situation I was in. I've shared it before, so perhaps some of you have heard it. But it was such a powerful experience for me, about ten years ago, when I did a vision quest.

I went out for four nights and five days with about four other people who were also on the quest, and there were two leaders who stayed down at the base camp. I was in England, so I wasn't out in the wilds of Utah or Colorado. It was mild, but it was still a vision quest. Out into this open space, without being near anyone, without any contact with other people. I went out without any food, without any water, taking just a pump because there was a stream where I could filter water when I needed it. I had two tarps and a sleeping bag, and that was going to be my life for five days. Again, wanting to challenge myself, to push the limits of my capacity.

Unfortunately, it rained. And as it does in England, if you know England, the rain can keep going for some time. It rained and rained and rained. Fortunately, the weather wasn't too cool. I was just warm enough—I didn't get cold. But as soon as I started walking out to my spot, about a mile or so from base camp, my boots were already sopping wet. All my clothes were wet. And that was just the beginning. I found a spot underneath a tree, put a tarp up and a tarp under me, had my sleeping bag, and dealt with it. And it rained and it rained and it rained.

Fortunately, I had my practice at that point. Because by the third day, I was wavering. I was sick, nauseous. I didn't know if I was going to be able to keep going. Every part of me felt miserable, felt terrible, felt uncomfortable. Why am I here? Why am I doing this? Maybe the rain stopped for an hour or two, but then it would rain again. And when I would try to sleep at night—I didn't sleep that much—sometimes I'd wake up because there'd be something crawling in my hair, and there'd be slugs. I'd have to pull slugs out of my hair. Really, really uncomfortable.

Because I had my walking meditation, and all I really did was walking meditation, walking back and forth, I started to wonder: What would it mean to be equanimous in this situation? How would anybody actually feel equanimity here? Would equanimity mean that somehow I would no longer feel the discomfort? That I would no longer feel the pain and the sickness and all the difficult conditions? Would I somehow be able

to transcend it all, and even though these conditions were so absolutely, utterly horrible, I would just be in the light? Walking back and forth with my wet boots and my wet clothes and my sick feeling, but I wouldn't even notice it? That I would just be in this blissful state—is that what equanimity is?

I just kept walking back and forth, asking and feeling and sensing. What would it mean to be equanimous in this situation? And finally, I understood that there wouldn't be any way to get rid of these conditions unless I went into some kind of very altered state of concentration, which I wasn't interested in doing at that point. I wanted to know what it would mean to fully be here in presence, embodied, to be equanimous. What does it mean to be equanimous in this world?

What I got was that where the equanimity lives is in the acceptance of what is. Allowing these conditions to be the way they are. They're painful. I'm sick. I'm nauseous. I don't feel good. That's the way it is. And what's my capacity to open to that, to be present with that? That's the question. Not is there a way to transcend this and get over it and go into some kind of white blissful state, but is there a way to work with my own capacity to be present in direct contact with the way I am and to open to that without the reactive mind?

It was a really important and enlightening insight for me. I worked with that, kept working with opening to the acceptance of it. And what came through then was the recognition that in the contact, what's required is care. That I actually need to take care of myself. Because it wasn't a necessarily healthy situation to be out there for three days without any food, with very little water, being somewhat cold, my body temperature starting to go down, starting to get a little weak and sick. This is something that needs attention. In the contact with the direct reality and allowing it to be as it is, there was the possibility for wisdom to come through.

There was the possibility for compassion to come through—not through rejection, not through trying to change it or make myself different, not through trying to transcend in some way, but through that direct contact, through the listening. Then I could access the wisdom and the knowing of how to respond moment to moment to moment.

In that connection, I realized that I had a limited capacity, that I couldn't push through. I couldn't go on anymore. And I did some more walking back and forth. This was the fourth day now, as I kept working with this. I had stayed the third night, and then on the fourth day I just kept sensing: What's my capacity? What's my capacity? And I realized that I needed to go in.

And I did it with complete conscious awareness that this was the wise and compassionate response to the situation—without pushing, without rejecting. I went in to base camp. If you know about vision quests, you can go into base camp early without breaking the quest, and they just take care of you. They put me in a tent up on the hill and gave me a little bowl of miso soup, hot miso soup.

And I was sitting in that tent with a little bowl of miso soup, and I felt like I was in nirvana. I think I

experienced one of the happiest mind states I've ever felt in my whole life—sitting in that tent with a little bowl of miso soup. Talk about relativity, right? The relative condition, conditionality. And I remember just resting there, protected from the rain, warm. They gave me a blanket. And the whole night I was in bliss. I was in bliss. And then the next morning I formally came out of the quest with the other people.

I learned so much in that situation about what is really being expected of me in this practice. What are we doing here? What is this really about?

And this coming into acceptance—I realize that acceptance really is the doorway to a deeper opening, to a deeper understanding, to a deeper connection with the resources of our being: our wisdom, our compassion, the strength of mind, the clarity of mind, the ability to be patient, to hold with care, with love. Acceptance is the first step. We don't end in acceptance. We don't stop in acceptance. It's the beginning. It's what holds us so that we can go further, so that we're not just caught in the reactive mind, the mind that we get entangled in where we can't see clearly. We can't respond well because we're caught in the manipulation, in the control, in the resistance. As soon as we start to come into this place of acceptance, so much opens for us. There's so much more available to us from here.

As we let go, we can begin to sink into the actuality. And yet oftentimes this itself can feel so fearful, because we think that if we really do let go into what's happening, we're going to get overwhelmed. We're going to get sucked in by these difficult conditions and we'll get lost. We'll just get pulled right in and that'll be the end. I think we're often quite afraid of that—that it's going to be too much, that the experience is going to be too much. And in a way, it's a loss of trust in ourselves, a loss of trust in our own capacity to take care of ourselves, to monitor. I really know now that if I'm in touch with myself in this way, I can make choices. I can make clearer choices about when to move more into an experience, or maybe when to back out of an experience, like I did on the vision quest. There's more ability to make this kind of clear choice for ourselves because those resources are there.

So when we open in this way, when we talk about opening to the unfamiliar, about letting go into the unknown, we are vulnerable. We are vulnerable when we let go. Vulnerability is part of this path. And I think sometimes we don't recognize this—we think if we're feeling vulnerable, then something's wrong. But it's part of what we open to: the fact that we are standing here naked in the face of reality that's constantly changing, constantly impacting us, that is completely out of our control, and that we don't know in the next moment what's going to happen. Of course we feel vulnerable when we actually understand and see the size of the cloth, what we're actually being asked to do—which is to let go, let go of everything, to stand here naked in the face of reality.

This is what we mean when we talk about letting go of the small self, letting go of the ego self. We can sometimes use this metaphor of standing naked. There's nothing in the way anymore. Our teacher, Ajahn Sumedho, says it's like standing under a waterfall—a strong waterfall, life impacting in this way. And when we stand under the waterfall, our heart is really touched, it's moved, it's impacted. And sometimes

we might ask the question: Can I bear this? Can my heart bear this kind of openness, this kind of vulnerability?

And so sometimes we have to close up. We have to draw on some of our old strategies to protect ourselves from this openness because it's too much. And we may not feel at certain times that we have the capacity to open in that way. We have to shut down. And this is part of the care, this is part of the wisdom, this is part of the compassion—knowing how to navigate, how to negotiate the conditions. Which, as I said, is much more obvious when we're here, when we're in touch with the way things are, when we're seeing clearly.

So we're asked to find some balance in this big waterfall, in this rushing waterfall of life. How do we find our balance? It's not easy. It's challenging for us. But I think we are being asked to bow down to each thing that arises, to receive each condition that arrives on our plate. Even if we can't open to it all the way, at least we can make that choice. When we see it, we bow down, we receive that, and say, "Okay, can I open to you or not? Well, not right now. I have to just back up a little bit." That's okay. You bow down to that. Pay respect to that.

This is from Rumi: "If God said, Rumi, pay homage to everything that has helped you enter my arms, there would not be one experience of my life, not one thought, not one feeling, not any act I would not bow to."

Pay homage to everything that has helped you enter my arms. I think this path takes incredible respect—deep, deep respect to ourselves and to others and the conditions that are arising moment to moment. It requires such a deep honoring of our own humanity, of our own limitations, of our capacities. And in this way, taking such deep care for ourselves as we walk along, as we go along.

And that means even paying deep respect to some of the difficult patterns that arise in our mind because, as I said, they may be acting as a kind of protection for us—because that's as far as we can go right now. If I feel sleepy or restless or agitated, even that sometimes, rather than pushing through—"What's wrong with me? I should be able to do better than this. Why can't I?"—bowing down, paying respect. Okay, what's happening right now? What do I need for myself right now? Making contact, listening in, taking care. Can we walk with this respect and patience and care for ourselves as we go along?

We don't have to jump in. "Okay, it's time to get enlightened"—with that attitude in mind. I mean, maybe we want to, but just to notice what's happening, what's moving in the heart and the mind. Where is it coming from? Where is that motivation arising from? And knowing it's just this, just this. Everything that we need to know, everything that needs to be revealed for our awakening is being revealed right in this moment, right now. Everything is here. And if you miss it this moment, you'll have another moment. It's all right here. Nothing changes. Nothing is really hidden away. It's just a question of opening our heart, opening our eyes in time.

I think maybe I'll end with this one question—not a poem, but a quote from Arthur Miller, from a play that

he wrote called *After the Fall*:

"I think it's a mistake to ever look for hope outside of oneself. One day the house smells of fresh bread, the next of smoke and blood. One day you faint because the gardener cuts his finger off. Within a week you're climbing over corpses of children bombed in a subway. What hope can there be if that is so? I tried to die near the end of the war. The same dream returned each night until I dared not go to sleep and grew quite ill. I dreamed I had a child, and even in the dream I saw it was my life, and it was an idiot, and I ran away. But it always crept back into my lap again, clutched at my clothes, until I thought, if I could kiss it, whatever in it was my own, perhaps I could sleep. And I bent to its broken face, and it was horrible, but I kissed it."

I think one must finally take one's life in one's arms.

Let's sit for a moment.

Thank you.

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